

A tongue-in-cheek remembrance

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Everyone has a disturbing memory from childhood. Here's mine: My mother calls us for dinner, and my brother and sister and I arrive at the table starved from play, only to find a roast and a mound of evil-looking lima beans in a serving dish, a huge pat of butter oozing down the middle.

The next half-hour is spent in strained silence, the three of us kids devouring the meat and sullenly pushing the lima beans from one side of the plate to the other. At this, my mother would express astonishment that anyone would not like lima beans.

Are there foods being served by parents today that kids love to hate? There were so many when I was growing up, even though my mother was a great cook and most of her meals were excellent.

Unfortunately, though, another favorite of my mother's was liver, which she served so charred that it looked like a Uniroyal retread sitting there on the plate.

She smothered the liver in fried onions, but this was strictly for cosmetic purposes. All it did was momentarily divert your attention, like the showgirl in a Siegfried and Roy act.

The bottom line was this: Once you got to the liver itself, it was like eating your belt, only chewier.

But the absolute worst thing my mother served us was, without a doubt, tongue.

Tell me something. How do you explain the concept of tongue to a small child?

Do you take the kid aside and drape an arm lovingly around her shoulders and say:

"OK, Ashley, what we're going to do is, we're going to take a cow, OK? And then we're going to, um, put the cow to sleep and cut her tongue out.

"Then we're going to boil the tongue and peel the outer layer of the skin off and put it on a plate and serve it. Now that sounds yummy, doesn't it,

sweetie?"

Hoo, boy. And we wonder where eating disorders come from.

When my mother served tongue, it would lie there on the platter, all pink and quivering, with tiny clouds of steam hissing from it.

My brother and sister and I would stare at it in bug-eyed horror, gag reflexes on full alert.

And do you know what my mother would say to us at times like this? This is the honest truth. She'd say: "If you put a little mustard on it, you'll really like it."

A little mustard?

A little mustard?!

Here's the thing, too: After an incident like that, can you ever fully trust your mother again when it comes to food?

Look, if she has no problem serving tongue — if she's willing to push the envelope that far — what's next on the menu?

The severed head of a groundhog? ("Just squeeze a little lemon juice on it.")

The hooves of a water buffalo? ("With a little A-1 Sauce, they really can be very tasty!")

From what I see, kids today won't have the same food horror stories to pass around that people of my generation have. That's because most parents have (mercifully) wised up and aren't serving lima beans or liver or tongue anymore.

Twenty years from now, what's the worst thing a kid will be able to say?

"Yeah, when I was a kid, my mom made me eat breaded chicken cutlet?!"

Ooooooh, gross! Chicken cutlet!

I don't know. To me, that just doesn't have the same effect.